



**Guru Nanak** <sup>[1]</sup> (Punjabi: ਗੁਰੂ ਨਾਨਕ, Hindi: गुरु नानक, Urdu: گورو نانک *Guru Nānak*) (15 April 1469 – 22 September 1539) was the founder of the religion of Sikhism and the first of ten Sikh Gurus. Sikhs believe that all subsequent Gurus possessed Guru Nanak's divinity and religious authority.

## // Biography

### Early life

**Guru Nanak Dev** was born on 15 April 1469, <sup>[2]</sup> now celebrated as Prakash Divas of Guru Nanak Dev, into a Bedi Kshatriya family in the village of Rāi Bhōi dī Talwandī, now called Nankana Sahib, near Lahore, Pakistan. <sup>[3]</sup>

Today, his birthplace is marked by Gurdwara Janam Asthan. (Some are of the opinion that 20 October is his enlightenment day rather than his birthday.) His father, Mehta Kalyan Das Bedi, popularly shortened to Kalu Mehta,

<sup>[4]</sup>

was the  
*patwari*

(accountant) of crop revenue for the village of Talwandi in the employment of a Muslim landlord of that area, Rai Bular Bhatti.

<sup>[5]</sup>

Guru Nanak's mother was Tripta Devi and he had one elder sister, Bebe Nanaki.

Nanaki married Jai Ram and went to his town of Sultanpur, where he was the steward (*modi*) to Daulat Khan Lodi, the eventual governor of Lahore. Guru Nanak was attached to his older sister, and, in a traditional Indian fashion, he followed her to Sultanpur to live with her and Jai

Ram. Guru Nanak also found work with Daulat Khan, when he was around 16 years old. This became a formative time for Guru Nanak, as the Puratan Janam Sakhi suggests, and as evidenced in his numerous allusions to governmental structure in his hymns, most likely gained at this time. [\[6\]](#)



*Gurdwara Nankana Sahib, Pakistan*

The earliest biographical sources on the life of Guru Nanak recognized today are the *Janamsāk hīs* (life accounts) and the *vārs* (expounding verses) of the scribe Bhai Gurdas. The most popular Janamsāk hīs were allegedly written by a close companion of the Guru, Bhai Bala.

[\[7\]](#)

However, the writing style and language employed have left scholars such as **Max Arthur Macauliffe** certain that they were composed after his death.

[\[8\]](#)

Bhai Gurdas, a purported scribe of the Gurū Granth, also wrote about Guru Nanak's life in his *v ārs*

. Although these too were compiled some time after Guru Nanak's time, they are less detailed than the Janamsāk hīs. The Janamsāk hīs recount in minute detail the circumstances of the birth of the guru. The Janamsakhis state that at his birth an astrologer, who came to write his horoscope, insisted on seeing the child. On seeing the infant, he is said to have worshipped him with clasped hands and remarked that "I regret that I shall never live to see young Guru Nanak as an adult."

At the age of five years Guru Nanak is said to have voiced interest in divine subjects. At age seven, his father, Kalu Mehta, enrolled him at the village school as was the custom. <sup>[9]</sup> Notable lore recounts that as a child Guru Nanak astonished his teacher by describing the implicit symbolism of the first letter of the alphabet, which is an almost straight stroke in Persian or Arabic, resembling the mathematical version of one, as denoting the unity or oneness of God. <sup>[10]</sup>

Other childhood accounts refer to strange and miraculous events about Guru Nanak witnessed by Rai Bular such as a poisonous cobra being seen to shield the sleeping child's head from the harsh sunlight.

### **Marriage and family**

Guru Nanak was married to Mata Sulakhni at about 19 years of age. <sup>[6]</sup> His marriage to her took place in the town of Batala. The marriage party had come from the town of Sultanpur Lodhi. The couple had two sons; Sri Chand and Lakhmi Chand. Sri Chand founded a renunciate/ascetic sect known as the Udasis. Later Gurus used to visit Sri Chand as a revered ascetic. The Udasis served as guardians of the historical Sikh sites until the British period.

### **Foundation of Sikhism and travels**



Rai Bular Bhatti, the local landlord and Guru Nanak's sister Bibi Nanaki were the first people who recognised divine qualities in Guru Nanak. They encouraged and supported Guru Nanak to study and travel. Sikh tradition states that around <sup>c.</sup> 1499, at the age of thirty, Guru Nanak failed to return from his ablutions, and his clothes were found on the bank of a local stream called the Kali Bein. The townspeople assumed he had drowned in the river; Daulat Khan had the river dredged, but no body was found. Three days after disappearing, Guru Nanak reappeared, staying silent. The next day, he spoke, making the pronouncement, "There is neither Hindu nor Mussulman (Muslim) so whose path shall I follow? I shall follow God's path.

God is neither Hindu nor Mussulman and the path which I follow is God's."

[\[6\]](#)

Guru Nanak said that he had been taken to the court of God. He was offered a cup filled with amrit (nectar) and given the command "This is the cup of the adoration of God's name. Drink it. I am with you. I bless you and raise you up. Whoever remembers you will enjoy my favour. Go, rejoice of my name and teach others to do so. I have bestowed the gift of my name upon you. Let this be your calling." From this point onwards, Nanak is described in accounts as a Guru, and Sikhism was begun.

[\[11\]](#)

Although the exact account of his itinerary is disputed, he is widely acknowledged to have made four major journeys, spanning thousands of kilometres, the first tour being east towards Bengal and Assam, the second south towards Tamil Nadu, the third north towards Kashmir, Ladakh, and Tibet, and the final tour west towards Baghdad, Mecca and Medina on the Arabian Peninsula. [\[12\]](#) At Mecca, Guru Nanak was found sleeping with his feet towards the Kaaba [\[13\]](#) Kazi Rukan-ud-din, who observed this, angrily objected. Guru Nanak replied to turn his feet in a direction in which God or the House of God is not. The Kazi understood the meaning of what the Guru was saying "God is everywhere".

[\[13\]](#)

The Kazi was struck with wonder.

### **Last years**

As the end approached Guru Nanak would frequently test the devotion of his sons and nearest followers and in doing so demonstrate their state of mind to one another. There were numerous such occasions and one particular devotee, Baba Lehna, rose to eminence because he never faltered in his faith in Guru Nanak.

Guru Nanak appointed Bhai Lehna as the successor Guru, renaming him as Guru Angad, meaning 'one's very own' or 'part of you'. Shortly after proclaiming Baba Lehna as the next Guru, Nanak died on 22 September 1539 in Kartarpur, at the age of 70. [\[14\]](#)

### **Teachings**

Guru Nanak's teachings can be found in the Sikh scripture Guru Granth Sahib, a vast collection of revelatory verses recorded in Gurmukhi.

From these some common principles seem discernible. Firstly a supreme Godhead who although incomprehensible, manifests in all major religions, the Singular 'Doer' and formless. It is described as the indestructible (without death) form.

Guru Nanak describes the dangers of the Egotism (haumai- 'I am') and calls upon devotees to engage in worship through the word of God (Naam — It implies God, the Reality, mystical word or formula to recite or meditate upon (shabad in Gurbani), divine order (hukam) and at places divine teacher (guru) and guru's instructions) [\[15\]](#) and singing of God's qualities, discarding doubt in the process. However, such worship must be selfless (sewa). The word of God, cleanses the individual to make such worship possible. This is related to the revelation that God is the Doer and without God there is no other. Guru Nanak warned against hypocrisy and falsehood saying that these are pervasive in humanity and that religious actions can also be in vain. It may also be said that ascetic practices are disfavoured by Guru Nanak who suggests remaining inwardly detached whilst living as a householder.

Through popular tradition, Guru Nanak's teaching is understood to be practiced in three ways:

- *Naam Japna*: Chanting the Holy Name and thus remembering God at all times (ceaseless devotion to God)
- *Kirat Karō*: Earning/making a living honestly, without exploitation or fraud
- *Vaᳵᳵ Chakkō*: Sharing with others, helping those with less who are in need

Guru Nanak put the greatest emphasis on the worship of the Word of God (Naam Japna). [\[15\]](#) One should follow the direction of awakened individuals (Gurmukh or God willed) rather than the mind (state of Manmukh- being led by Self will)- the latter being perilous and leading only to frustration.

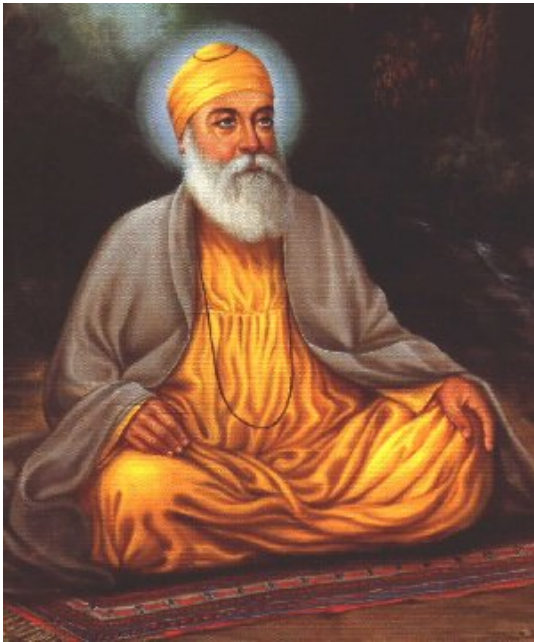
Reforms that occurred in the institutions and both Godhead and Devotion transcending any religious consideration or divide as God is not separate from any individual.

## Baburbani

Baburbani (Hymns about Babar) - pronounced BaaburBaani — are verses in a hymn composed by Guru Nanak (which are part of the Guru Granth Sahib) that refer to Babar's invasion of India, an event that occurred during Guru Nanak's lifetime. [\[16\]](#) The notable aspect of these verses is

that we do not usually find such elaborate descriptions to outside events in bhakti verses of many bhagats, despite this being such a tumultuous time in Indian history. In this hymn Guru Nanak uses the metaphor of a marriage party in describing the invasion of Babur. The ironic use of terms associated with marriage customs seems to be a subversion of the populist and widespread archetype of 'the beloved' that preoccupied Northern Indian religious and artistic thought at the time.

## Death



When it became clear that the death of Guru Nanak Dev ji was near, a dispute arose among his followers. His Hindu followers wanted to cremate the remains while his Muslim followers wanted to bury the body following Islamic tradition. Kabir brokered a compromise by suggesting that each group should place a garland of flowers beside his body, and those whose garland remained unwilted after three days could dispose of his body according to their tradition. However, the next morning, upon raising the cloth under which the Guru Nanak's body lay, only the flowers shared between his followers were found. The Hindus cremated their flowers whereas the Muslims buried theirs. Kabir Das Ji departed to heaven as he came from.

*"As descendeth the Lord's word to me, so do I deliver it unto you, O Lalo: (Babar) leading a wedding-array of sin hath descended from Kabul and demandeth by force the bride (India), O Lalo. decency and righteousness have vanished, and falsehood struts abroad, O Lalo. Gone are the days of Qazis and Brahmans, satan now conducts the nuptials, O Lalo. The Muslim women recite the Qur'an and in distress remember their God, O Lalo. Similar is the fate of Hindu women of castes high and low, O Lalo. They sing paeans of blood, O Nanak, and by blood, kumkum is made, O Lalo. In this city of corpses, Nanak proclaimeth God's praises, and uttereth this true saying: The Lord who created men and put them to their tasks watcheth them*

from His seclusion. True is that Lord, true His verdict, and true is the justice He dealeth. As her body's vesture is torn to shreds, India shall remember my words. In seventy-eight they come, in ninety seven shall depart; another man of destiny shall arise. Nanak pronounceth words of truth, Truth he uttereth; truth the time calls for." [ 17]

Guru Nanak puts the event up to the prospect of a merciful yet all-powerful God, describing powerfully yet with muted economy the state of events and how this related to questions of suffering and oppression, and the transcendence of life.

## References

1. <sup>^</sup> [Guru Nanak](#) may be referred to by many other names and titles such as **Baba Nanak** or **Nanak Shah** .
2. <sup>^</sup> Macauliffe, Max Arthur (2004) [1909]. *The Sikh Religion* — *Its Gurus, Sacred Writings and Authors* . India: Low Price Publications. p. 1. ISBN 81-86142-31-2. "The third day of the light-half of the month of Baisakh (April-May) in hthe year AD 1469, but, some historians believe that the Guru was born on 15 April 1469 A.D." . Generally thought to be the third day of Baisakh (or Vaisakh) of Vikram Samvat 1526.
3. <sup>^</sup> Singh, Khushwant (2006). *The Illustrated History of the Sikhs*. India: Oxford University Press. pp. 12–13. ISBN 0-19-567747-1. Also, according to the Purātan Janamsākhī (the birth stories of Guru Nanak).
4. <sup>^</sup> "[Guru Nanak Sahib, Guru Nanak Ji, First Sikh Guru, First Guru Of Sikhs, Sahib Shri Guru Nanak Ji, India](#)" . Sgpc.net. <http://www.sgpc.net/gurus/gurunanak.asp> . Retrieved 2009-08-09.
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6. <sup>^</sup> [a](#) [b](#) [c](#) Cole, W. Owen; Sambhi, Piara Singh (1978). *The Sikhs: Their Religious Beliefs and Practices* . London: Routledge & Kegan Paul. 9. ISBN 0-7100-8842-6.
7. <sup>^</sup> "[Early Gursikhs: Bhai Bala Ji | Gateway to Sikhism-Gateway to Sikhism](#)" . Allaboutsikhs.com. [http://www.allaboutsikhs.com/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=17](http://www.allaboutsikhs.com/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=17) . Retrieved 2010-05-02.
8. <sup>^</sup> [Macauliffe, Max Arthur](#) (2004) [1909]. *The Sikh Religion* — *Its Gurus, Sacred*

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9. <sup>^</sup> [Macauliffe, Max Arthur](#) (2004) [1909]. *The Sikh Religion* — *Its Gurus, Sacred Writings and Authors* . India: Low Price  
Publications. p. 2. ISBN 81-86142-31-2.

10. <sup>^</sup> Cunningham, Joseph Davey (1853). *A History Of The Sikhs*. London: John Murray. pp. 37–38.

11. <sup>^</sup> Cole, W. Owen; Sambhi, Piara Singh (1978). *The Sikhs: Their Religious Beliefs and Practices* . London: Routledge & Kegan Paul. 9–10. ISBN 0-7100-8842-6.

12. <sup>^</sup> Dr Harjinder Singh Dilgeer (2008). *Sikh Twareekh*. Belgium & India: The Sikh University Press.

13. <sup>^</sup> <sup>a</sup> <sup>b</sup> Guru Nanak: A Global Vision — Dr Inderpal Singh and Madan jit Kaur

14. <sup>^</sup> ["The Sikhism Home Page: Guru Nanak"](#) . Sikhs.org. <http://www.sikhs.org/guru1.htm> . Retrieved 2009-08-09.

15. <sup>^</sup> <sup>a</sup> <sup>b</sup> ["The Sikhism Home Page"](#) . Sikhs.org. <http://www.sikhs.org/art2.htm> . Retrieved 2010-05-02.

16. <sup>^</sup> ["Baburvani"](#) . gurudwara.net. [http://www.gurudwara.net/gurudwaranet/Gurudwara\\_Net\\_Article\\_Details.aspx?AID=2](http://www.gurudwara.net/gurudwaranet/Gurudwara_Net_Article_Details.aspx?AID=2)

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## See also

- [Life of Guru Nanak through Pictures](#)

## External links

- [Guru Nanak Dev Ji](#)
- Singh, Kirpal (First edition March 2004). ["Janamsakhi Tradition - An Analytical Study"](#) . globalsikhstudies.net.

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- [Nanak, Life And Time](#) Documentary Film by [Navalpreet Rangji](#)
- [Guru Nanak by Jyotsna Kamat](#)

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